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SSG Meeting

Lebanon

31 August 1983

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

30 August 1983

LEBANON: Responsibility for Current Fighting

Summary

Available evidence points to the Druze as having been most heavily involved in the shelling in Beirut over the past two days. The Shia were also involved, although apparently to a lesser extent. The 82-mm mortar rounds that killed the US Marines could have come from a range of no more than two miles, indicating that one of the Lebanese groups, rather than the Syrians, was responsible for that attack. [redacted]

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The Syrians have routinely provided intelligence, logistical support, and weapons to both the Druze and the Shia, but we lack confirmed evidence on the extent of direct Syrian involvement in the current fighting. We believe the Syrians at a minimum have been indirectly involved in the shelling over the past two days, and we know Syrian units have shelled Lebanese Government positions elsewhere in Lebanon. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, at the request of the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence. Information as of the 30 August 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division. [redacted]

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Evidence on Factors Involved in Recent Fighting

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Syrian involvement in the small arms fire, on the other hand, is far less clear. The Embassy in Beirut reported yesterday that in addition to the Shia Amal militia, a variety of other gunmen--including Communists and Nasserists--were in the streets, and there is no hard evidence on Syrian links to the current activity of these groups. US military officials in Beirut have reported that Army Commander General Tannous had indicated the Army sweep on Monday was aimed at seizing Shia arms caches in South Beirut. This Army-initiated move was a violation of a tacit understanding Tannous had reached with Shia leader Nabih Barri some time earlier, prompting stiff Shia resistance.

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Reports on the shelling and small arms fire include the following:

28 August 1983

- Beirut domestic service reported at 2103 hours, local Beirut time, that the shelling of the airport, which occurred 30 minutes earlier, originated from the Upper Matn. This area is Syrian-controlled, but Druze militia operate there.

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28 August 1983

- Reuters reported heavy fighting between LAF and Shia militiamen, with one mortar round hitting a runway at the airport.

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29 August 1983

- as of 1000 hours, Beirut local time, Marine Amphibious Units at the airport received mortar rounds and small arms fire. No identification of perpetrators.

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29 August 1983

-- Marines responded to shelling of their positions with 155-mm artillery, "silencing a Druze position." [REDACTED]

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29 August 1983

-- In a phone conversation with Ambassador Dillon on Monday, Shia Amal leader Nabih Barri denied that the Shia attacked the Marines. He said the shells came from the mountains. [REDACTED]

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30 August 1983

-- [REDACTED] the rounds that killed two Marines were fired from 82-mm mortars. [REDACTED]

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Syrian Warnings

Damascus has issued several warnings that Syria will actively oppose a decision by President Gemayel to send the Lebanese Army into the Shuf.

- The Syrian Government newspaper Tishrin warned in an editorial last Saturday that Damascus would "confront and deter" any move by the Army into the Shuf.
- In an earlier editorial, Tishrin commented that Gemayel's insistence on sending the LAF into the Shuf without achieving political reconciliation would ensure a civil war. It concluded with a clear warning: "We would like to draw Gemayel's attention to the fact that Syria is concerned directly with this matter in the event he still insists on carrying out his threat Gemayel and the others certainly know what this means." [redacted]

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Although Syrian editorials consistently take more extreme positions than official statements, we believe the editorials clearly signal President Assad's continuing inflexibility and opposition to Lebanese Army deployment into the Shuf. [redacted]

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Syrian Political Position Hardening

Ambassador Paganelli reported from Damascus this morning that Druze leader Walid Junblatt found Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam and Chief of Staff Shihabi uncompromising in his meetings with them following the talks in Paris. Junblatt told the Ambassador that the basic issue remains the Israeli-Lebanese Agreement on troop withdrawal. The Syrians would not accept an announcement that the instruments of ratification would not be exchanged. Junblatt said he had been unable to find a formula acceptable to Damascus. [redacted]

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Junblatt did not meet with President Assad, but we believe the President is likely to remain equally uncompromising. With Prime Minister Begin's announcement of his intention to resign and President Gemayel clearly on the defensive, Assad almost certainly sees an opportunity to push for abrogation of the agreement and to force Gemayel into a political accommodation with Syria's allies in Lebanon. Assad will probably continue to argue that the only solution is to achieve a "comprehensive national reconciliation." [redacted]

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